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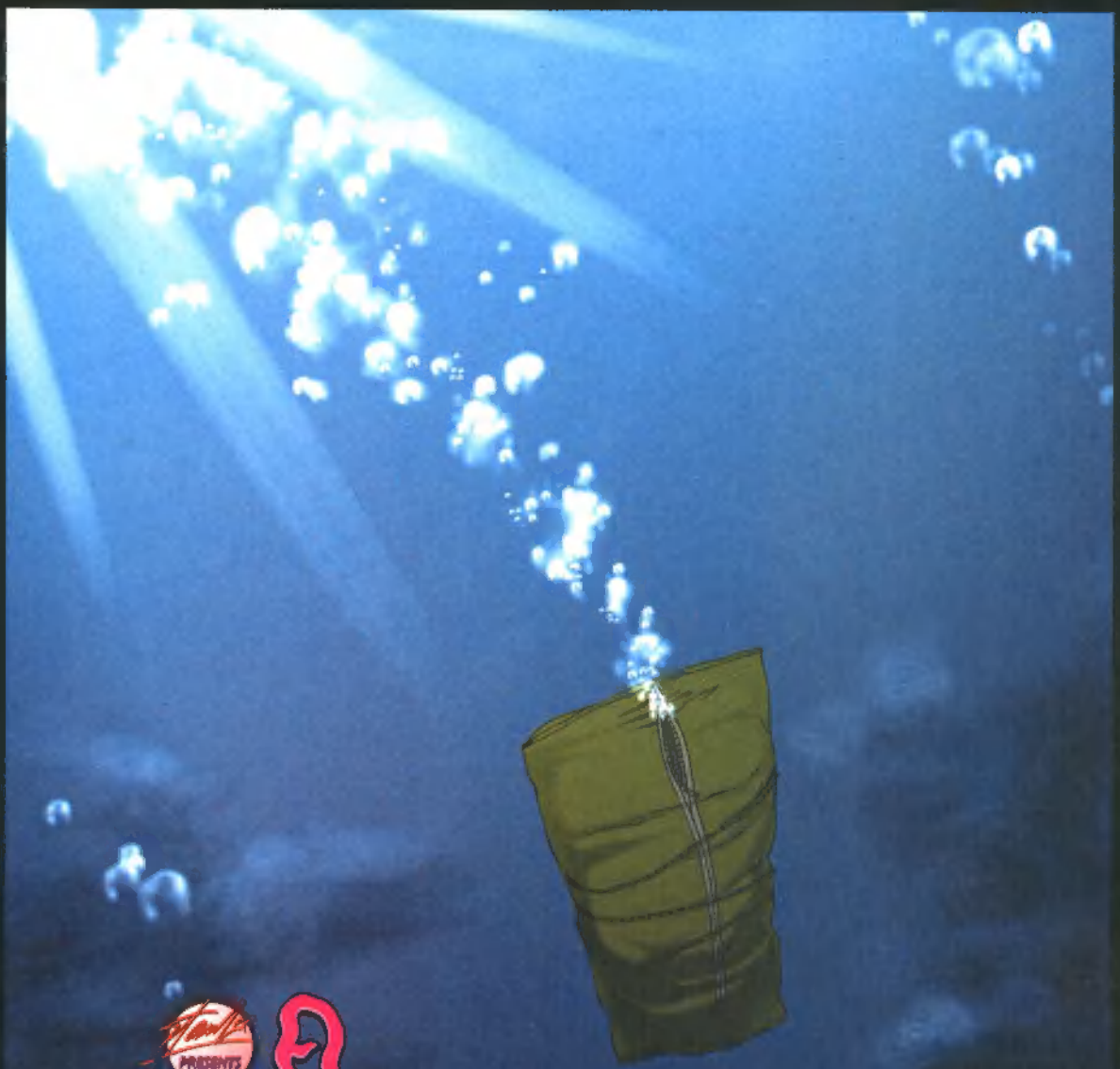

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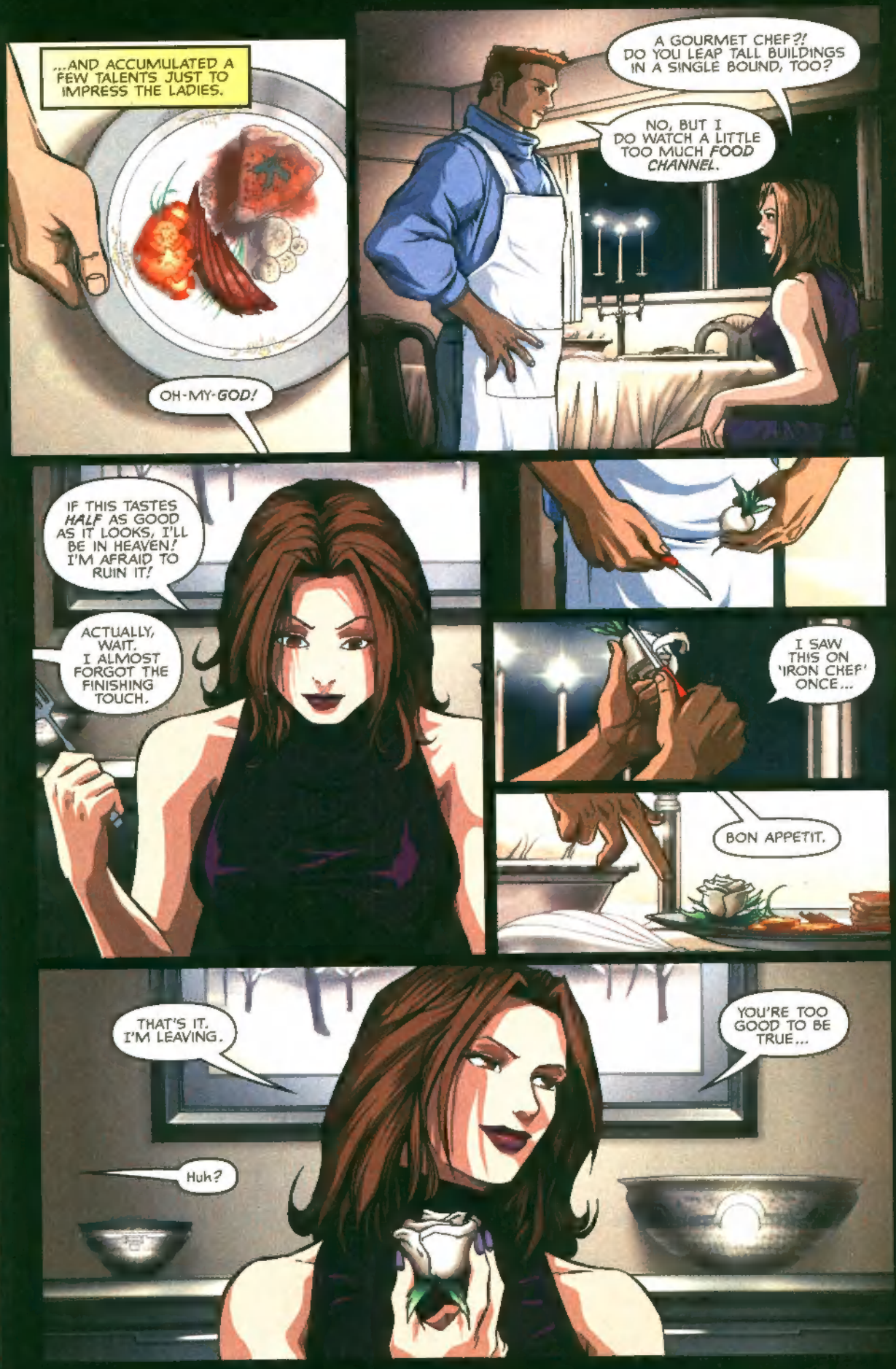
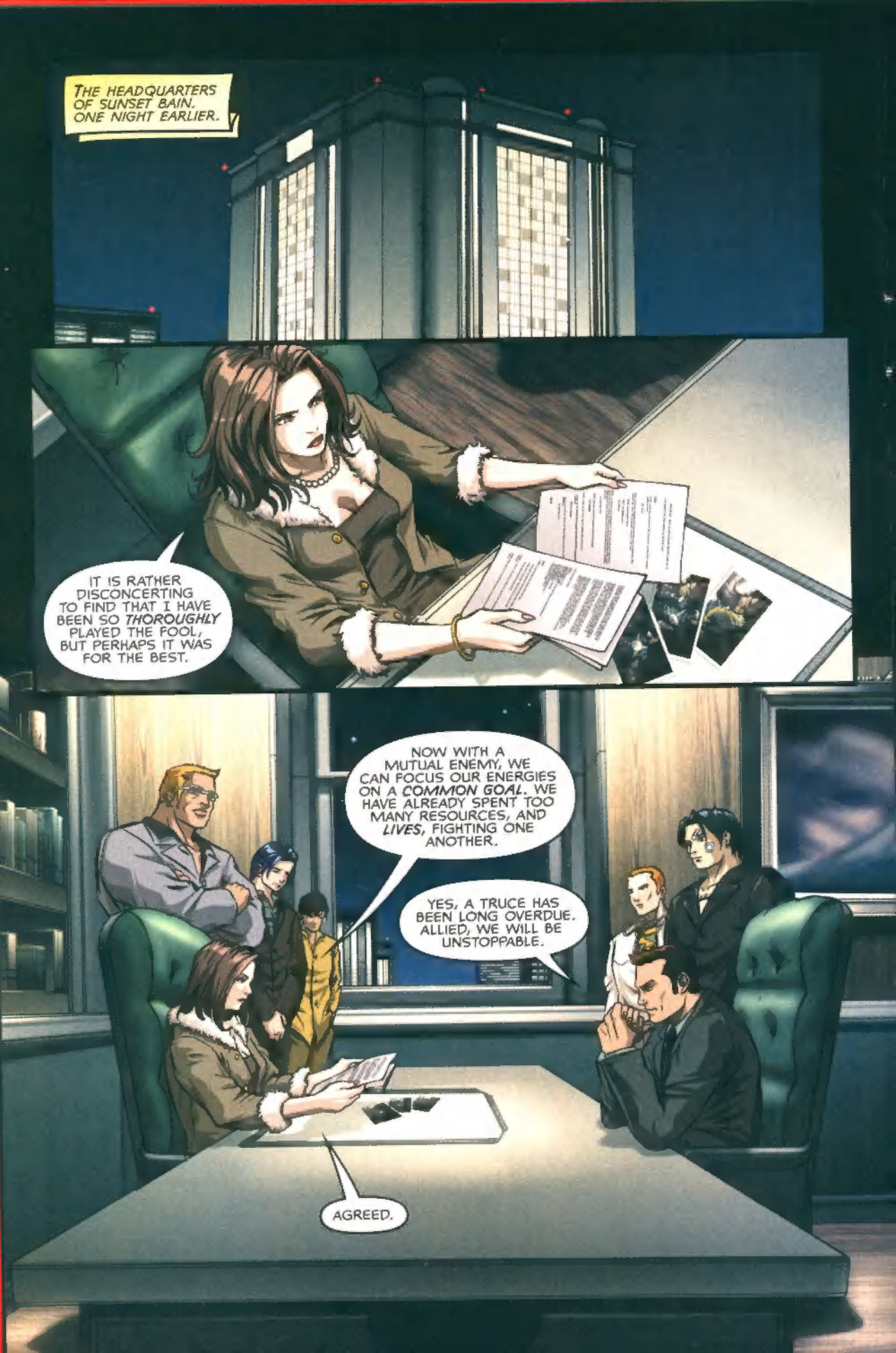
TWO NIGHTS EARLIER.
OVER THIRTY OF OUR MEN DEAD... DOZENS OF OUR BUSINESSES IN ASHES...
HONG, I CAN'T EVEN BEGIN TO FATHOM WHAT YOU WERE THINKING WHEN YOU ORDERED OUR-- MY-- MEN TO MOVE ON SUNSET BAIN.
YOU KNEW RETRIBUTION FROM BAIN WOULD BE INEVITABLE. SO WHY DO IT, HONG? WHY?
I DIDN'T--
THERE ARE TWO POSSIBILITIES: YOU WERE EITHER COMPLETELY OUT OF YOUR MIND, OR YOU WERE SCREWING WITH ME.
HACK! U-UNCLE LO... I'M TELLING YOU, I DIDN'T GIVE THAT ORDER...
SIGH I TRUSTED YOU HONG. I LOVED YOU MORE THAN MY OWN BLOOD, BUT EVEN NOW YOU WON'T COME CLEAN WITH ME...
CHAK

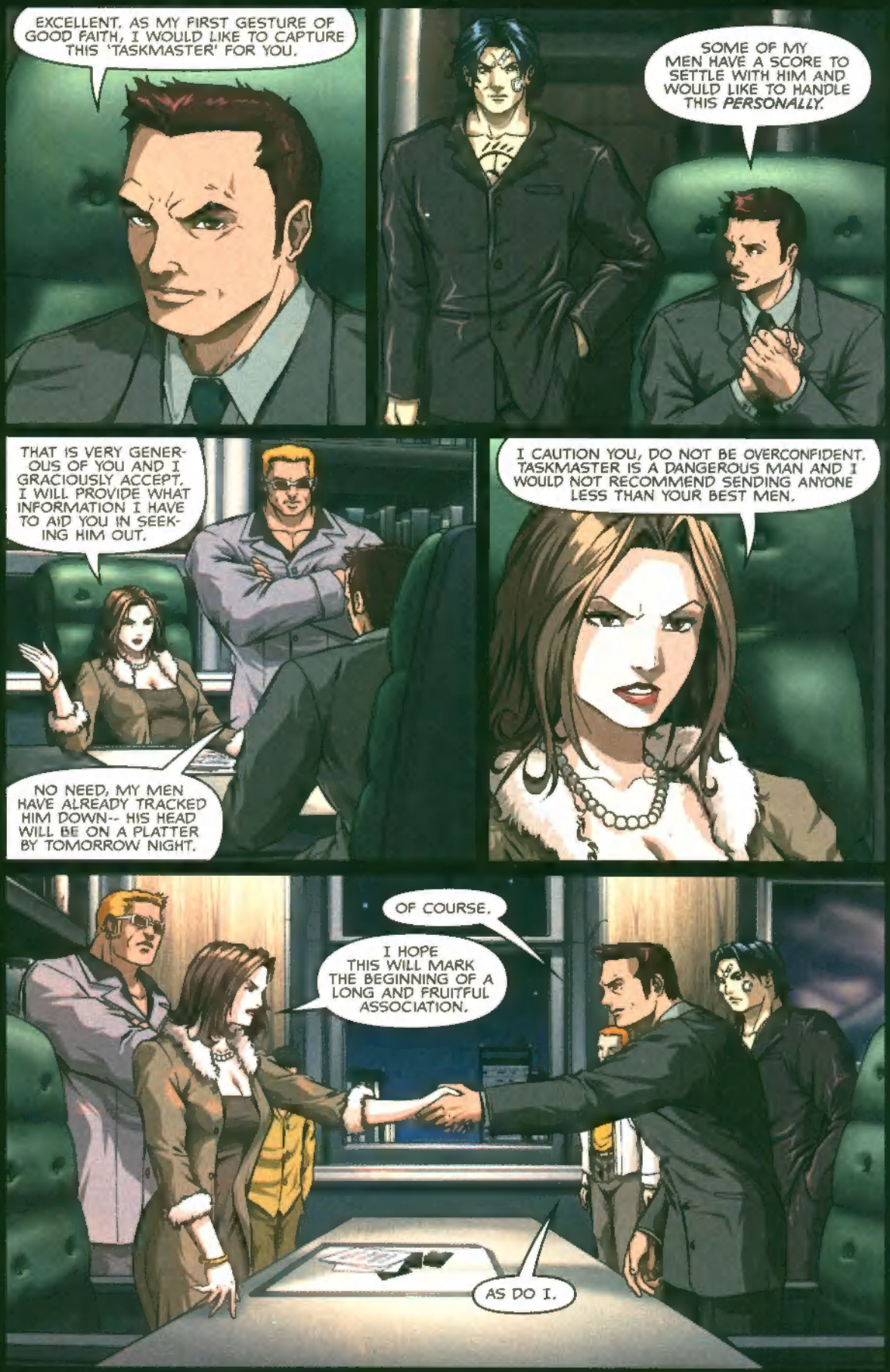
GOODBYE, HONG.
BREEP! BREEP!
LO.
UNCLE LO, IT'S BENNY! IS HONG STILL ALIVE?
HE WILL BE FOR ANOTHER FIVE SECONDS OR SO.
DON'T KILL HIM! HE DIDN'T DO IT!
WHAT?
I'LL EXPLAIN EVERYTHING-- I'VE GOT PROOF.
ALL RIGHT...
CONVINCE ME.
CLICK

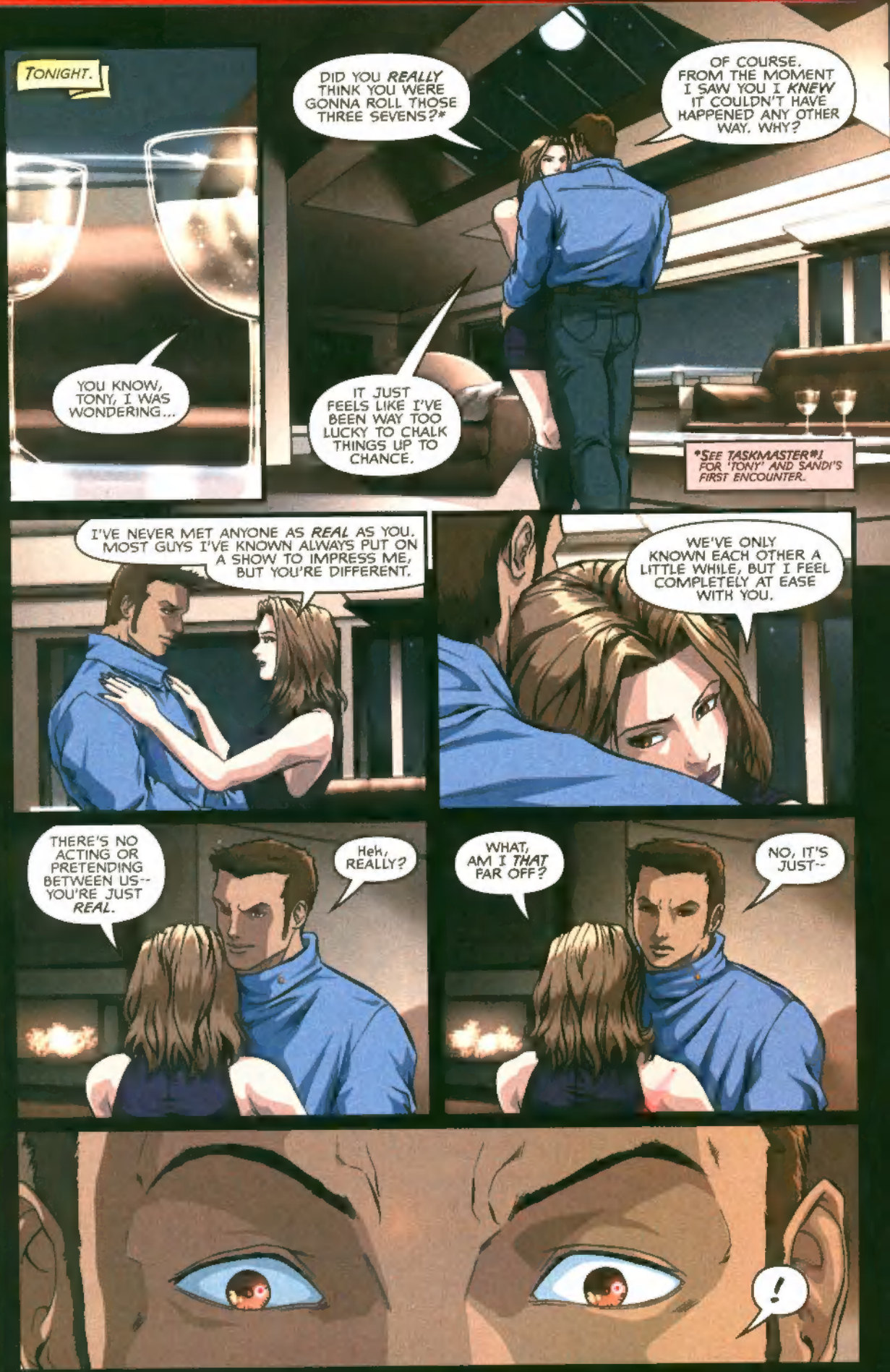
MINUTES LATER.
BENNY, PLEASE TELL ME WHAT THE *HELL* I'M LOOKING AT.
IT'S FROM ONE OF MY POLICE CONTACTS. ONE OF THEIR DEPARTMENTS WAS KEEPING HONG'S APARTMENT UNDER SURVEILLANCE.
THIS TAPE WAS FROM THE NIGHT 'HONG' SUPPOSEDLY GAVE THE ORDER FOR THE HITS ON BAIN.
WHO IS THIS MASKED FREAK?
I ALREADY HAVE MEN ON IT.
GET HONG CLEANED UP AND ARRANGE A MEETING WITH BAIN.
WE NEED TO TALK.

TONIGHT.
THERE IS A LOT THIS HAND IS CAPABLE OF.
PHOTOGRAPHIC REFLEXES, MY ABILITY TO OBSERVE AND MIMIC ANY ACTION, HAVE GIVEN IT EXTRAORDINARY ABILITIES.
THIS HAND HAS LEARNED TO STEAL, FIGHT, KILL AND ON OCCASION...
...COOK.
CHOK
NOT EVERY SKILL THAT I'VE MENTALLY FILED AWAY AS THE TASKMASTER HAS BEEN FOR BUSINESS.
PICKED UP A TECHNIQUE OR TWO TO HELP MY GOLF SWING, WATCHED THE WINTER OLYMPICS TO LEARN HOW TO SKI...


...AND ACCUMULATED A FEW TALENTS JUST TO IMPRESS THE LADIES.
OH-MY-GOD!
A GOURMET CHEF?! DO YOU LEAP TALL BUILDINGS IN A SINGLE BOUND, TOO?
NO, BUT I DO WATCH A LITTLE TOO MUCH FOOD CHANNEL.
IF THIS TASTES HALF AS GOOD AS IT LOOKS, I'LL BE IN HEAVEN! I'M AFRAID TO RUIN IT!
ACTUALLY, WAIT. I ALMOST FORGOT THE FINISHING TOUCH.
I SAW THIS ON 'IRON CHEF' ONCE...
BON APPETIT.
THAT'S IT. I'M LEAVING.
Huh?
YOU'RE TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE...


THE HEADQUARTERS OF SUNSET BAIN. ONE NIGHT EARLIER.
IT IS RATHER DISCONCERTING TO FIND THAT I HAVE BEEN SO *THOROUGHLY* PLAYED THE FOOL, BUT PERHAPS IT WAS FOR THE BEST.
NOW WITH A MUTUAL ENEMY, WE CAN FOCUS OUR ENERGIES ON A *COMMON GOAL*. WE HAVE ALREADY SPENT TOO MANY RESOURCES, AND *LIVES*, FIGHTING ONE ANOTHER.
YES, A TRUCE HAS BEEN LONG OVERDUE. ALLIED, WE WILL BE UNSTOPPABLE.
AGREED.


EXCELLENT. AS MY FIRST GESTURE OF GOOD FAITH, I WOULD LIKE TO CAPTURE THIS 'TASKMASTER' FOR YOU.
SOME OF MY MEN HAVE A SCORE TO SETTLE WITH HIM AND WOULD LIKE TO HANDLE THIS *PERSONALLY.*
THAT IS VERY GENEROUS OF YOU AND I GRACIOUSLY ACCEPT. I WILL PROVIDE WHAT INFORMATION I HAVE TO AID YOU IN SEEKING HIM OUT.
I CAUTION YOU, DO NOT BE OVERCONFIDENT. TASKMASTER IS A DANGEROUS MAN AND I WOULD NOT RECOMMEND SENDING ANYONE LESS THAN YOUR BEST MEN.
NO NEED, MY MEN HAVE ALREADY TRACKED HIM DOWN-- HIS HEAD WILL BE ON A PLATTER BY TOMORROW NIGHT.
OF COURSE.
I HOPE THIS WILL MARK THE BEGINNING OF A LONG AND FRUITFUL ASSOCIATION.
AS DO I.


TONIGHT.
YOU KNOW, TONY, I WAS WONDERING...
DID YOU *REALLY* THINK YOU WERE GONNA ROLL THOSE THREE SEVENS?*
IT JUST FEELS LIKE I'VE BEEN WAY TOO LUCKY TO CHALK THINGS UP TO CHANCE.
OF COURSE. FROM THE MOMENT I SAW YOU I *KNEW* IT COULDN'T HAVE HAPPENED ANY OTHER WAY. WHY?
*SEE TASKMASTER #1 FOR "TONY" AND SANDI'S FIRST ENCOUNTER.
I'VE NEVER MET ANYONE AS *REAL* AS YOU. MOST GUYS I'VE KNOWN ALWAYS PUT ON A SHOW TO IMPRESS ME, BUT YOU'RE DIFFERENT.
WE'VE ONLY KNOWN EACH OTHER A LITTLE WHILE, BUT I FEEL COMPLETELY AT EASE WITH YOU.
THERE'S NO ACTING OR PRETENDING BETWEEN US-- YOU'RE JUST *REAL*.
Heh, REALLY?
WHAT, AM I *THAT* FAR OFF?
NO, IT'S JUST--
!

BRATATATA!
GET DOWN!
AIIEEEE--!
KEEP YOUR HEAD DOWN. WE'RE GOING TO MAKE A BREAK FOR THE FRONT DOOR ON THREE.
WHAT THE HELL DO YOU MEAN 'ON THREE'?!
ONE...
THERE ARE BULLETS EVERY-WHERE!!!
I'M NOT GOING ANY-WHERE!!!
...TWO...
...THREE!
AAAAHHH! PUT ME DOWN!!
CRASH!
BLAM!
BLAM!
BLAM!
SKASH!
THEN AGAIN, THAT MIGHT NOT BE SUCH A GOOD IDEA.

GUNS?!
WHY DO YOU HAVE *GUNS* IN YOUR *SPICE CUPBOARD?!*
OMIGOD! Y-YOUR FACE! WHO *ARE* YOU?!
I'LL EXPLAIN EVERYTHING AFTER I HANDLE THIS, SANDI.
HIDE IN HERE AND DON'T MAKE A SOUND.
I DON'T WANT THIS TO BE THE LAST TIME I SEE YOU.
BACK IN A MINUTE.

HE'S IN THE KITCHEN.
Heh heh... TOO EASY!
BRATATATATA!
ERATATTATATT!
OUR SHOTS AREN'T *DOING* ANYTHING!
THAT WOULD BE BECAUSE IT'S A HOLOGRAPHIC PROJECTION.
???
BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!
WHUD!
THERE APPEAR TO BE TOO MANY CHEFS IN THE KITCHEN.

BLAM!
BLAM!
IDIOTS! KILL HIM!
EASIER SAID THAN DONE.
BA-DAM!
BA-DAM!
BA-DAM!
BLAM!
BLAM!
BLAM!
BLAM!

T-TONY? IS THAT YOU?
IS-- IS IT OVER?
BLAM!
ARRRGH!
Oh, GOD. PLEASE DON'T KILL ME...
TONY!!

HOT DATE YOU'VE GOT HERE, FREAK!
I BARELY EVEN KNOW HER.
BA-DAM!

NO...
STUPID...
KRAKT!
=UHN!=

IT APPEARS OUR ALLIANCE WITH YOUR ORGANIZATION HAS ALREADY YIELDED DIVIDENDS. MY DEEPEST THANKS TO YOU, HONG.
YOU'RE WELCOME. AS LO SAID, WE'VE FOUGHT EACH OTHER LONG ENOUGH.
ISLEY, LET ME TAKE A LOOK AT HIM.
NICE TO SEE YOU AGAIN, TASKMASTER.
COUGH! THE PLEASURE'S MINE, SUNSET. BROUGHT ME HERE TO PAY THE REST OF YOUR TAB?
SILENCE! Ms. BAIN WILL NOT BE SPOKEN TO WITH SUCH INSOLENCE!
THWACK!
SNAP!
ENOUGH PLEASURE, TIME FOR BUSINESS...

WHAT THE HELL?!
YOU'LL NEVER SURVIVE THIS, BAIN! IF YOU KILL US, YOU CAN'T IMAGINE THE RETALIATION THAT WILL FOLLOW!
FROM WHOM? THE ONLY TRIADS LEFT OF ANY SIGNIFICANCE ARE HERE BEFORE ME.
UNCLE LO?
DEAD... ALONG WITH ALL THE HEADS OF YOUR ORGANIZATION.
THEY WERE SURPRISINGLY VULNERABLE WHILE YOUR MEN WERE OCCUPIED WITH OTHER MATTERS.
...
NOW, NOW. YOU DO UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF 'FACE', DO YOU NOT?

HOW IRRESPONSIBLE WOULD IT HAVE BEEN IF I HAD ALLOWED YOUR ATTACKS ON ME TO GO UNPUNISHED?
BAIN! I'LL KILL Y--
BLAM!
BLAM!
BLAM!
BLAM!
BLAM!
BLAM!
STRANGE, Ms. BAIN. I WOULD HAVE IMAGINED THE END OF THE TRIADS TO BE MORE OF A BANG.
A WHIMPER WILL SUFFICE.

NICE WAY TO REWARD YOUR ALLIES.
I TREAT MY ENEMIES EVEN BETTER.
I GUESS THAT'LL MAKE ME YOUR NEXT DEFENSELESS VICTIM, RIGHT?
Oh, NO. EXECUTING YOU SO PAINLESSLY WOULD BE FAR TOO KIND.
YOU'LL BE TORTURED TO WITHIN AN INCH OF YOUR LIFE, BUT KEPT ALIVE LONG ENOUGH TO ENJOY BEING STUFFED INTO A WEIGHTED BODY BAG AND DROWNED.
SEND MY REGARDS TO THE TRIADS.
GOODBYE.

GURGLE
GURGLE
GURGLE
TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT ISSUE!